

Sent on October 6, 2015

Dear Commissioner Cortese:

The Bay Area Transportation Working Group (BATWG) is a relatively new, all volunteer organization that struggles to keep up with a myriad of Bay Area transportation issues. Many of us have long been close observers of MTC and its programs.

At your next meeting you will be asked to approve a momentous and...we think ill-advised...change in the Region's way of conducting its land use planning. Below is a BATWG report that responds to the proposed takeover of ABAG's central planning function by MTC.

We would be pleased to discuss any aspect of our report with you, with other commissioners or with your staff.

Respectfully,

Gerald Cauthen for  
BATWG

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ccs to all MTC and ABAG Commissioners

## **MTC Director's Proposed Takeover of Regional Land Use Planning: BATWG Report**

October 6, 2015

**Introduction:** MTC Director, Steve Heminger would like to take over ABAG's regional land use planning function. **This is a very bad idea that the Bay Area Transportation Working Group (BATWG) strongly opposes.**

Mr. Heminger believes that his proposal would give him more control over regional planning and lead to the more efficient use of resources. In an effort to sell his idea Director Heminger made a 2-hour presentation to his commission at its regular September 23, 2015 meeting. His presentation featured a number of alleged problems that he said could have been avoided had he been in charge. The take-over proposal is scheduled to be considered and acted upon by MTC at its regular October 28th meeting.

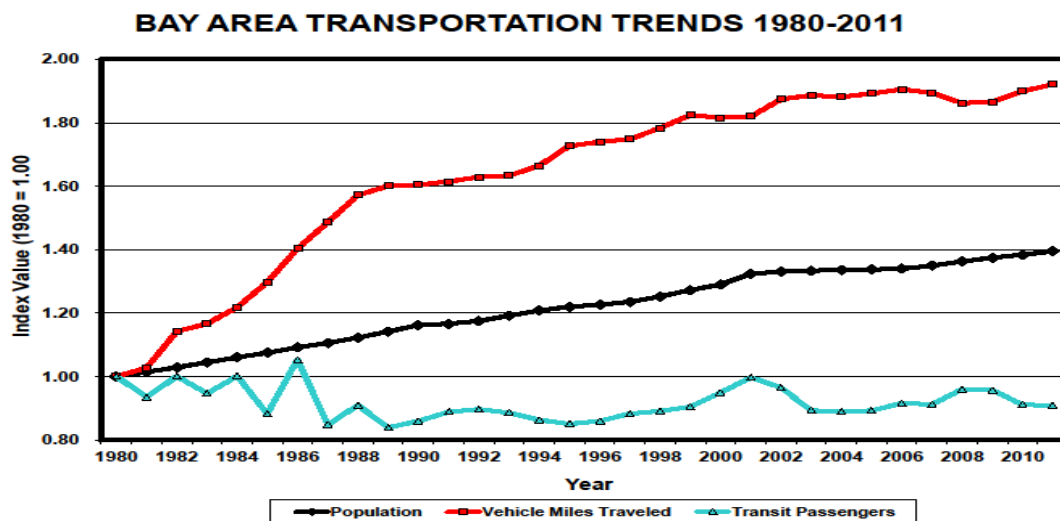
Mr. Heminger's proposal is that ABAG's land use planners be transferred to MTC to carry on their work under his supervision and control. If the two agencies were working side by side as co-equal partners, such an amalgamation of functions could conceivably lead to some efficiencies. But unfortunately the two agencies do not work as equals. On the contrary, as ABAG's funding source, MTC habitually uses its position of influence to disadvantage ABAG in the competition for regional planning funding. This disparity was dramatically underscored by Mr. Heminger himself on September 23rd when he acknowledged that because of MTC-imposed budget constraints on ABAG, ABAG's planners are paid substantially less than MTC's own planners.

On 9/23, many ABAG and former ABAG employees as well as representatives of LABOR, various Bay Area towns and cities, civic and environmental groups and others spoke out in opposition to Mr. Heminger's takeover proposal. As was emphasized by many speakers, placing ABAG's central planning function under MTC control would severely weaken ABAG and perhaps lead to its demise. Hayward Mayor Barbara Halliday went on to suggest that if the planning functions of the two agencies were combined into one group, the new team should be managed by ABAG, the Region's planning agency, rather than by MTC, its planning-adverse transportation funding agency.

**ABAG:** ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments) is a well established regional land use planning agency with a large and complex constituency comprised of dozens Bay Area municipalities and other public agencies. In developing the regional land use plan, an ongoing program made more challenging by the advent in 2008 of SB 375, ABAG works closely with these local jurisdictions and agencies. In recent years the ABAG staff has demonstrated an increased sophistication in regional transportation planning as well as land use planning. In fact, many believe that ABAG's strategic commitment to a sound

regional transportation system (as opposed to a cobbled together set of local pet projects) is now stronger than MTC's own commitment. By any yardstick ABAG is well-qualified to work as MTC's full and equal partner in the development of an effective regional land use/transportation plan.

**MTC:** On September 23rd, the MTC Executive Director focused on a small number of alleged ABAG staff mistakes but said nothing about the MTC staff's own shortcomings. Yet in terms of addressing the Region's most pressing transportation problems MTC's success rate has been low. In order to keep things in perspective it is necessary to enumerate some of MTC's past failures, the results of which are clearly depicted by following chart, prepared for BATWG by CPA and Transportation Consultant Tom A. Rubin. **As shown in the chart, under MTC stewardship there has been a steady increase in vehicle miles traveled, a steady worsening of traffic congestion and a steady decline in per capita transit use. In addition, the Region is now faced with a looming transbay rail capacity crunch and worsening city gridlock. Neither of these worsening transportation conditions are even now receiving the attention and priority they deserve.**



In short, MTC's large and well paid staff , while adept at moving money around , has shown itself as singularly unable to put together a regional transportation plan or otherwise address and resolve the Region's growing transportation problems. This long time failure to satisfy regional transportation needs has occurred despite

the tens of billions of transportation dollars that have passed through MTC hands during the last 25 years. Why has this happened? How could it have happened? Following are a few of the major priority and funding mistakes that have caused the Bay Area transportation malaise:

## **MTC's Legacy of Failures (a partial list)**

**MTC killed the proposal to bring trains back to the Bay Bridge:** In 1998 it was recognized that because of the Loma Prieta earthquake and its effect on the Bay Bridge East Span, there was a new opportunity to return passenger rail service to the Bay Bridge. Under pressure from San Francisco, Oakland, Emeryville and Berkeley MTC reluctantly hired a consultant to study the idea. In late 2000 the Consultant concluded that the proposal to put trains back on the Bridge was “technically feasible but costly”. Costly compared to what? MTC didn't ask. Instead, the next day MTC Director Heminger killed the idea. As a direct result of this breathtakingly short-sighted decision, the Region passed up an opportunity to do for \$6 billion what will now cost at least \$25 billion.

**MTC Presided over the East Span Debacle:** For reasons unknown, MTC's Director, who is not an engineer much less a bridge engineer, became the Chair of the three-person Bridge Oversight Committee - thereby denying the slot to a bridge expert who could probably have avoided both the quadrupling of the cost of the project and the current East Span maintenance nightmare. Thanks to its naive and ill-informed decision to replace the existing Cantilever Span with an exotic but impractical and grotesquely over-priced new structure, the BOC took 24 years and almost \$7 billion to fix a problem that could have been eliminated in 10 years for a cost of \$1.5 billion.

**MTC Strongly Promoted the Oakland Airport Connector (OAC):** There used to be a shuttle bus system between the Coliseum BART station and the Oakland Airport. The one-way, 3-mile bus trip took 12 minutes and cost \$3. The same 3-mile, one-way trip of its replacement, the \$600 million OAC, now takes 15 minutes and costs \$6.

**MTC pushed the Presidio Freeway through the State approval process:** This project started out as a straightforward upgrade of the Presidio of San Francisco's Doyle Drive, initiated largely because of three seismically-deficient viaducts located near the Palace of Fine Arts. The price of the project, as set forth in the

November 4, 2003 San Francisco Voter's Handbook, was \$420 million. The ultimate cost of the project is a carefully kept secret, but is judged to be at least \$2 billion.

**MTC abetted the Construction of San Francisco's Central Subway:** This 1.7 mile light rail line was shown in the November 4, 2003 San Francisco Voter's Handbook as costing \$647 million, a price that has since almost tripled. Equally disturbing is the fact that the project was deceptively sold to unsuspecting politicians and others on the basis of grossly exaggerated trip time savings, wildly over-estimated ridership projections, and a projected \$23.2 million a year drop in Muni operating costs that has since morphed into a \$15.1 million a year increase in Muni operating costs.

**MTC Acted in Violation of State Proposition 1A:** Prop 1A, the high-speed rail (HSR) bond issue passed in 2008, set aside \$950 million to help pay for improving connections between local rail systems and HSR. This set-aside has resulted in some worthwhile improvements, such as the upgrading of Los Angeles's Union Station and improvements to the Caltrain commuter rail service.

However not everything has gone smoothly. Led by Mr. Heminger, MTC improperly diverted \$61.3 million in connectivity money to Central Subway which, traveling on Fourth Street as it does, doesn't come even close to connecting to HSR. In fact by diverting the existing Third Street light rail T-Line away from the Transbay Transit Center (San Francisco's HSR stop), the Central Subway project completely eliminates what would have been direct rail access to HSR access from southeast San Francisco.

**MTC's \$6 billion HOT Lane Program:** "HOT lanes" (now called "express lanes") are built to give affluent motorists a way of bypassing highway slowdowns and gridlock. MTC's program adds a new wrinkle. Under MTC's backward-looking approach, over 300 new lane miles of freeway are being quietly included in the program, thereby enlarging the freeways, a practice which virtually everyone now knows does little but encourage more freeway driving and ultimately more urban traffic congestion.

**MTC's Unaccountable Opposition to Upgrading ACE:** As noted above, the steadily growing demand for BART transbay service will soon exceed BART's transbay carrying capacity. For this reason the need for a second passenger rail line across the Bay has long been recognized. By far the cheapest and quickest way of easing pressures on both Bay Area freeways and BART's already over-crowded transbay section would be to significantly upgrade ACE and extend a new

leg of ACE westward across a rebuilt Dumbarton rail bridge and then northward via the Caltrain right-of-way to downtown San Francisco. Thanks to MTC's total lack of support, this vital project languishes for the lack of attention and funding.

**MTC's Support of the ill-conceived BART Extension to Livermore:** This 11.3 mile proposed BART extension from its East Dublin Station to Greenville Lane in the low density eastern end of Alameda County would ultimately cost a projected \$3.8 billion. As BART itself has shown, there are much cheaper and better ways of providing excellent transit service to the people of Livermore and others at the east end of Alameda County.

**Alternative Approaches:** Despite many egregious lapses in transportation judgment as summarized above, Director Heminger is determined to secure the immediate approval of his Commissioners to take on regional land use planning as well as transportation planning.

There are clearly much better approaches to the development of a workable regional land use/transportation system. It appears that the fastest and easiest way of assuring that the staffs of the two planning departments work together effectively would be for the ABAG and MTC Commissions to assert stronger authority over their respective Executive Directors, who in turn could make certain that the planners directed their talents to solving the Region's real transportation and land use problems - which in MTC's case would mean replacing its current practice of burning up transportation resources on large projects of small consequence with something more useful.

Four individuals sit on both the ABAG Board and the MTC Board. If necessary, this overlap of Board members could be increased. Perhaps the joint members of the two Boards could jointly oversee the work of the two cooperating planning groups.

There are a number of other ways in which the alleged lack of a good working relationship between the two agencies could be addressed **without the need of one agency uprooting and absorbing the central planning function of the other.**

**BATWG's Conclusions:** It would be useful to look for ways of improving the working relationship between MTC and ABAG. However, the objective should be broader than just ensuring cooperation between the respective

planning groups of the two agencies. The focus should be on developing and implementing an effective long range regional transportation system as well as a good regional land use program. If, as part of this effort, structural changes to one or both of the two agencies were deemed necessary, they should come as a result of a carefully analyzed process and after the affected constituencies were thoroughly briefed and brought up to speed on the proposed changes and their implications.

**In the mean time ABAG should be left alone to do its job. Its full fiscal year funding should be approved in the same manner as it has been approved in the past. If there are unreasonable disparities between salary levels because of inappropriate budgetary constraints imposed on ABAG by MTC, they should be corrected forthwith. It is MTC that needs major restructuring and reform, not ABAG.**